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*Desert House of Prayer*

Spring 2020

Dear Desert Companions and Friends,

I am writing you as COVID-19 is threatening and interrupting the well-being of our Mind, Body, and Spirit. When human life is normal, we look for joy, understanding and well-being to bring light into our lives and hearts. As we look to the future with the shock of COVID-19 we search for a ray of hope for wholeness and peace of mind and spirit. The virus has brought darkness into our personal, communal, and professional lives. A sense of tragedy, loss, bereavement, illness, uncertainty, and dread is crashing in on us daily. There is no one who can avoid being touched by pain; no defense strong enough to make us invulnerable to the unpredictability of life with COVID-19.

The place to find wholeness, light, and well-being will not come from outside. Rather it is here and now even in the midst of our suffering and difficulties. In this time of darkness and distress, we are tempted to long for an ideal future or seek miraculous solutions to protect us from pain and powerlessness. Seeking answers where there are no answers, we miss the wisdom and the mystery that is before us each day – the rising of the sun, the heart beating, the changing of seasons, the miracle of human compassion, caring, love, and communication, and the presence of God always with us.

The present moment of the pandemic is an opportunity to learn how to live with life's challenges and hardships, to discover light and darkness, and to remain open to the possibility of healing for ourselves and the world around us.

Living in peace and serenity in the midst of anxiety and helplessness, calls for patience, understanding, wisdom, and love. We must be willing not to turn away from the darkness of what threatens us but towards it. Naming our anxieties, fears, insecurity, self-doubt, and despair is the first step in becoming free in the midst of the darkness. It is not darkness that is our enemy but our rejection and denial of it. In the midst of our greatest challenges and difficulties, we find everlasting, unquenchable Light. The darkness we identify as adversary is our most profound teacher.

Wholeness of Mind, Body, and Spirit is not the opposite of challenge, suffering, and hardship. The presence of light which many of us identify as God is not a result of darkness ending. God is not found in the absence of challenge, but in our capacity to welcome the mystery of God's presence in our suffering, hardship, resistance, and powerlessness. We will discover new energy, faith, and hope in this moment of God with Us. Our true nature, our healing, and our well-being shines when we stop looking elsewhere and discover that Who and What we seek has been with us all along. The Mystery of the Whole Christ is fully present with us in this moment bringing hope and new life. Happy Easter!

## **DHOP NEWS**

With COVID-19 upon us, DHOP closed March 22, 2020. It will remain closed until the CDC indicates that it is safe to reopen for public hospitality. In the meantime, the Core Community is sheltering in place. Temporarily, we have had to let some of the staff go until we reopen. Please pray God will keep these faithful and committed members of the DHOP Community safe until they can return to work.

**Fr. Thomas Picton, DHOP Director.** I will be resigning my position as Director of DHOP June 1, 2020. After much prayer and discernment, I believe it is time for me to move on to let others with their gifts further the mission of DHOP. This is a difficult decision that I do not make lightly. There is a season for everything. My season as Director of DHOP is over, and it is time for a new season. It is now time for me to take another step in letting go, to face my limitations, my fear of falling, my fear of failure and yet another step to becoming human. I trust that the Spirit of God and the DHOP Community at Large, which includes all of you who have retreated at DHOP, will hold the vision and purpose of DHOP and help it move forward with vigor and life.

**Fr. Greg Wiest, C.Ss.R.** Fr. Greg Wiest will become the new **Director of DHOP**. Fr. Greg is a native of Dickeyville, Wisconsin. While attending Redemptorist High and College Seminaries, Greg came to appreciate diversity and the goodness of his mentors. After completing his graduate work at Catholic Theological Seminary in Chicago, he was ordained in 1989. Before his assignment to DHOP, he was associate pastor of St. Alphonsus Church in Chicago, St. Alphonsus Church in St. Louis, Redemptorist liaison to the Hesychia Spiritual Direction Program and Sabbatical Program for priests and religious at Redemptorist Renewal Center in Tucson, and local superior of the Redemptorist Community in New Orleans.

Fr. Greg is committed to contemplative practice and reflects that contemplation fosters a sacred awareness at the Center that is a power available to everyone. He is inspired by the unfamiliar beauty of desert landscape, crescent moons, star encrusted nights, and pink sunsets. He is passionate about the art he has been doing for twelve years and will once again be able to enjoy his old art studio at RRC where he can paint and write. Fr. Greg believes that creativity is the place where the created and the divine intersect.

**Master Plan and Capital Campaign.** The Master Plan for improving the DHOP facilities and building a new Welcome Center and the Capital Campaign to support it will be put on hold until we can assess the health of our society, our country, and the well-being of our desert companions, friends, and benefactors beyond the COVID-19 crises. Suddenly, this is not the season for brick and mortar campaigns. We will wait until we discern that it is appropriate to resurrect such plans.

## **SPRING APPEAL**

We are entering uncharted economic times. We ask you to be as generous as possible with the Spring Appeal to enable us to navigate the months we are closed. We will be operating on a bare

bones budget. We will do our best to protect a small reserve of money in savings that will enable us to reopen when the CDC indicates that it would be safe for the public.

**DHOP Wish List:** During the months DHOP is closed the facilities will undergo deep cleaning. We will inventory each guest room and determine what towels, linens, and accessories may need to be replaced. Here are some items on the DHOP wish list: towels, linens, a possible door between Guest Coordinator offices, cleaning equipment, e.g., small buffer, a second clothes dryer.

While the Master Plan is a dream, there are some urgent needs that could become emergencies in the near future: cooling/heating systems for the library and chapel that need replacing. Both systems are at risk and are working beyond their life expectancy! This is just one example of the many needs Bro. Bill places with trust in the Providence of God.

DHOP is applying for a foundation grant to help replace floors and fixtures in each guest bathroom. We will not know until May whether the grant request will be accepted.

### **Until Our Journeys Meet**

Saying goodbye seems too final. Until our journeys meet again, may everyone with whom I have shared my life—core community, retreat guests, friends, desert companions, and benefactors—be graced, blessed, and renewed in spirit. Everything I have come to be today is because of you and the faithfulness of God’s presence, mercy, and grace. Thank you for everything.

### **Final Thought**

COVID-19 is challenging so many of our core beliefs and values. Contemplative practice opens and expands our consciousness to experience and live more fully the love of God. In her book, *Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening*, Cynthia Bourgeault, paraphrasing Ephesians 3:18, writes “rooted and grounded in love (you) may come to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ – that you may be filled with the very nature of God.”

Faithfully,



Fr. Thomas Picton, C.Ss.R.  
Director / Desert House of Prayer

